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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 27.01.2009

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USAID Announces the Fourth Year of the Community Connections Program in Kyrgyzstan and Begins its 2009 Recruitment Campaign

Bishkek, Akipress, January 27, 2009, 10:30am – A press conference will be held to announce the 2009 Community Connections Program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Approximately 50 area experts in the fields of energy management, municipal management, blood safety and infection control (including waste management), and school/university administration will be selected in an open, nationwide, merit-based competition to participate in the program.

The Community Connections Program provides an opportunity for community leaders and subject area professionals from Kyrgyzstan to go on three-week professional exchanges in the United States, while living with host American families. The program also provides an opportunity for citizens of the United States and Kyrgyzstan to work together to address common professional challenges while expanding their social and cultural understanding.

During the press conference, speakers from USAID and the Community Connections Program will explain how the program work, including selection criteria for program participants. All applicants receive equal consideration, and are evaluated by selection committees that include U.S. Embassy representatives and field experts. The Community Connections Program looks for individuals who are flexible, open-minded, interested in new ideas, and committed to sharing knowledge gained during the program with colleagues. Program alumni from previous years also will share their experiences from their time in the United States on the Community Connections Program.

Since November 2005, the Community Connections Program has facilitated the participation of 129 Kyrgyzstanis in professional development and cultural exchanges in the United States. In 2006, 2007, and 2008 Community Connections sent groups to the U.S. to exchange ideas and experience on NGO development and the role of associations, handicraft in small business, religion in secular society, religious diversity, overcoming contemporary challenges in Islam for professional women, congruence of religious and secular education, role of medical professionals, education in community development, and Muslim leaders in community development.

More information on the 2009 program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and deadlines will be available and regularly updated at: www.americancouncils.kg

The Community Connections Program is one of many assistance projects in Kyrgyzstan funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on behalf of the American people. In 1993 USAID started providing technical assistance to Kyrgyzstan. Since then the American people through USAID have provided more than \$400 million through its programs supporting economic growth, democratic institutions, health care, and education systems in Kyrgyzstan.